# Nature Connections

News and Events from the Missouri Department of Conservation • January/February 2014



**Vultures** Nature's Clean-Up Crew

hen looking for winter wildlife viewing opportunities, vultures are probably not the first thing you consider. If you are looking for an unusual and guaranteed opportunity to see vultures in large numbers, Lake Taneycomo is the place to see these misunderstood birds.

#### Who are they?

Vultures live worldwide and belong to an often vilified group of animals called scavengers (even the name "scavenger" sounds bad). These animals feed on the dead and decaying bodies of other animals and a variety of plants. If you think that's all there is to know about vultures then you are "dead" wrong. There are two species of vultures that call Missouri home. They are the turkey vulture and the black vulture. The turkey vulture has a red, bald head and large portions of its underwings are silvery white. The black vulture has a black, nearly bald head and only the tips of its underwings are white. The turkey vulture is far more common and can range as far north as southern Canada. The black vulture is found mostly in the southern half of Missouri and farther south into South America. Turkey vultures rarely go after live food; however, black vultures are more aggressive and have been known to attack weak or dying prey. While both vultures are sometimes called "buzzards," that term is officially reserved for a hawk that lives in Europe. Vultures appear to be related to eagles and hawks, and they are given the same protection as birds of prey (hawks, owls, and eagles). However, genetically and anatomically, they are more related to storks.

#### So what good are they?

Vultures do what most other animals can't or won't do—eat dead and decaying animals. They are so well adapted to this task that the Latin genus name for the turkey vulture is *Carthartes* 

or "purifier." Vultures are able not only to consume decaying and rancid flesh, but are also able to neutralize dangerous bacteria (even botulism) with their powerful stomach acids. This truly makes them nature's clean-up crew.

## Masters of the unusual. It is not unusual for vultures

to feed on a dead carcass until they are too full and unable to fly. But just because they can't fly does not mean they cannot defend themselves. Vultures have an unusual defense if an animal like a coyote (or human) approaches too closely projectile vomiting! Vultures are able to accurately throw up on unwelcome visitors at distances up to six feet. This not only discourages any potential threats, but it also lightens their body weight and gives them the opportunity to fly away. A second unusual feature that vultures utilize is the ability to cool themselves with their own urine. By urinating on their bare legs, vultures can utilize a cooling effect as the urine evaporates on warm days. Another oddity is their lack of vocalizations. You will never have to memorize the song of a vulture because they do not have a syrinx or voice box. Except for hissing and grunting, they are voiceless. Finally, vultures will not win any awards for nest building. In fact, they put little or no effort into their nest. They take advantage of laying eggs on the ground surface of a cave or overhang. This also means that vultures must be vigilant to protect their eggs and young until they can fly.

How do you see these amazing birds up close? The Shepherd of the Hills Fish Hatchery in Branson will host its 18<sup>th</sup> annual *Vulture Venture* event on Saturday, February 22, from Noon to 5 p.m. This unusual event allows visitors to get up close



to a live turkey vulture. At the top of each hour, Socrates (from Springfield's WOW Museum) will make appearances with his handler. After the live vulture presentation, you and your family will get to participate in a variety of vulture games and activities. Outdoor activities include the opportunity to see one of the largest winter vulture roosts in Missouri. Volunteers and staff will have spotting scopes set up to help you see the large numbers of vultures along Lake Taneycomo. For centuries, vultures from as far north as southern Canada have migrated to southern Missouri to roost along the protected valley of the White River. This event is free and requires no reservations. All participants will receive a free vulture print. For more information or directions to the Shepherd of the Hills Fish Hatchery, call 417-334-4865, ext. 0, or go to <mdc.mo.gov/node/290>.

Whether you enjoy vultures at the 2014 *Vulture Venture* event in Branson or on your own, we hope that you continue to discover nature and its often unusual splendor.

- John Miller, Interpretive Center Manager

## **Joplin Office** in the Wildcat Glades Conservation and Audubon Center 201 W. Riviera Drive, Suite B, Joplin, MO 64804 • mdc.mo.gov/node/292



The Joplin Conservation Office, located in the Wildcat Glades Conservation and Audubon Center, is your local connection to Missouri's fish, forests, and wildlife. Stop by and purchase hunting and fishing permits, attend a nature program, go for a hike, enjoy a picnic, or access Shoal Creek. Within the 190 acres of Wildcat Park, you will find a diverse mix of wildlife habitats rich with flora and fauna. From I-44, take exit 6, and turn south on MO-86. Turn right on Riviera Drive to enter Wildcat Park.

#### **HOURS:**

Monday–Friday: 8 AM–5 PM Closed all state holidays. Audubon Center hours vary.

#### TO REGISTER FOR A PROGRAM:

Programs are free. Call 417-629-3423 to sign up for a program requiring registration. If you are unable to attend a program, please call and cancel as a courtesy to those on the waiting list.

January and February Events

## Master Naturalist Training Public Interest Meeting

January 6 • Monday • 6:30—8:30 PM
Walter Woods Conservation Area (Joplin)
Registration required (ages 18 and up)
Attend this informational meeting to discover more about the Missouri Master Naturalist volunteer program. If you desire to learn about the management and protection of Missouri's natural resources, become a Certified Master Naturalist. Participants take forty hours of basic training, eight hours of advanced training, and contribute forty hours of natural resource-related volunteer service in our community, all while working with existing chapter members. There is no cost or obligation to attend this meeting. Check out the local chapter website at <chertglades.org>.

#### **Fly-Fishing And Fly-Tying**

January 11 • Saturday • 9 AM—1 PM
Roaring River State Park (Cassville)
Registration required (ages 12 and up)
Discover the basics of fly-fishing equipment, casting, and fly-tying. Local outdoor writer, Silas Gray, and the MAKO Fly-Fishing Club will assist in hosting this half-day workshop aimed at getting you started with new skills to catch fish. By the end of this class, participants will have had the opportunity to catch fish on flies they created during the class. Dress appropriately for the weather. Participants may bring their own gear; however, all gear and materials will be provided. A valid fishing permit is required.

#### Arborist Certification Examination Training

January 14 to February 18 • Tuesdays 6:30–9 PM
Wildcat Glades Conservation and Audubon Center (Joplin)

Registration and \$30 fee required (ages 18 and up) Training is designed to prepare for the International Society of Arboriculture Certification Exam. Optional book Arborists' Certification Study Guide is available for \$85. For more information or a registration form, call Jon Skinner at 417-629-3423.

#### **Stella Eagle Day Event**

January 25 • Saturday • 10 AM—3 PM Stella Veterans' Memorial Park (Stella) No registration required (all ages) The fish-filled streams of southwest Missouri are the winter home to bald eagles. Join the Joplin Conservation Office, community of Stella, and Missouri Master Naturalists for an eagle-viewing opportunity. There will be spotting scopes set up and fun educational activities for all ages throughout the day.

#### **Introduction To Trout Fishing**

February 21 • Friday • 6:30–8 PM Walter Woods Conservation Area (Joplin) Registration required (ages 7 and up) Have you ever wanted to go trout fishing, but didn't know what to use or where to go? We will introduce locations to fish in southwest Missouri, what equipment and bait you need, and how to clean and cook your catch.

#### **Short-Eared Owl Hike** February 8 • Saturday • 4:30 PM—Dusk

Shawnee Trail Conservation Area (near Mindenmines) Registration required (ages 8 and up) It's winter in Missouri and short-eared owls may be seen flying low over native grasslands in search of mice, rabbits, and other small mammals. Join us to discover more about these and other feathered winter residents.

#### Ask The Naturalist . . .

Does Missouri have any owls that hunt during the day?

While most owls hunt at night, short-eared owls hunt during the day. The name comes from the tiny tuft of feathers, not ears, on top of the head. In Missouri, they are observed mostly in the winter when the owls migrate to open grasslands in search of rodents. Unlike the rest of our owls, short-ears roost on the ground hidden in the grasses. Just before dark, they emerge in search of mice, rats, and other small prey. Their flight is unique —more of a flutter, almost like a moth—before a swift dive in search of their prey. This behavior may be seen again near dawn on prairies from December through February. Since short-ears live in open grasslands and are diurnal, meaning active during the day, they are more easily observed than other Missouri owls.

Check out a local prairie this winter or register for one of our winter outings to view these unique owls. While you're out, you may discover other feathered winter migrants like northern harriers, rough-legged hawks, and various winter sparrows, all of which share the winter hunting grounds of the short-eared owl.

-Betty Sue Badger, Volunteer Naturalist



## Andy Dalton Shooting Range and Outdoor Education Center

4897 N. Farm Road 61, Ash Grove, MO & 65604 • mdc.mo.gov/node/288 DISCOVER NEADIFIE

#### January Events \_

#### **Cross Trail Outfitters**

January 16 • Thursday • 5-7:30 PM Registration required (ages 7–17) Join the families of Cross Trail Outfitters and learn all sorts of techniques for hunting and different outdoor activities. This program is designed for youth ages 7–17, but parents will have fun learning too. For more information or to register, email Kirk Bouse at <kbouse@teamcto.org>.

#### **Metallic And Shotgun Shell** Reloading Basics

January 18 • Saturday • 8:30-11:30 AM Registration required (ages 18 and up) Now is the time to start saving money while having fun reloading your own ammunition for hunting or target shooting. Join us for this basic course about reloading rifle, pistol, and shotgun shell ammunition because you will have great satisfaction breaking targets or shooting bull's-eyes using your own manufactured rounds. We will cover all aspects of reloading from brass care and preparation to bullet selection and primer selection and much more.

To get to the Andy Dalton Shooting Range and Outdoor Education Center, take US Highway 160 west of Willard, turn south on Farm Road 61, and go 2.5 miles, facility on the west side of road. Facilities include an outdoor education center and archery, rifle, pistol, and shotgun ranges, including skeet and trap.

#### February Events\_

#### **Firearms Basic Care And Cleaning**

February 1 • Saturday • 8:30-11:30 AM Registration required (all ages) Join us to learn the basics of the care and cleaning of firearms. This program will include tips and techniques for all aspects of maintenance of your firearm. You may bring your own unloaded firearm to class or use ours.

#### **Cross Trail Outfitters**

February 20 • Thursday • 5-7:30 PM

Registration required (ages 7–17) Join the families of Cross Trail Outfitters and learn all sorts of techniques for hunting and different outdoor activities. This program is designed for youth ages 7–17, but parents will have fun learning too. For more information or to register, email Kirk Bouse at <kbouse@teamcto.org>.

#### Firearm Cleaning



Hunting seasons are over, so now what? The time has come to do a thorough cleaning of your firearms before storing them for the off-season. Start by gathering a cleaning kit and all the things you might need like a cleaning rod, wet and dry patches, bore brushes to fit the caliber of firearm, dental picks, scrubbing brushes,

and some kind of gun cleaner. Be sure you have gun cleaner and not brake cleaner because the latter may damage your firearm. Once you have all the cleaning materials gathered, it is time to bring your firearm into the equation.

Most importantly, point the firearm in a safe direction and then make sure it is completely unloaded before proceeding. Once you visually and physically verify the firearm is unloaded, begin by using a wet patch on a cleaning rod through the bore. This helps remove loose debris and allows the lead particulate to begin loosening. Next, change to a bore brush, dip it into a solvent of some kind, and scrub the inside of the bore and chamber area. Clean the firearm starting with the chamber end if possible being careful not to damage the crown or muzzle of the firearm. Once you have thoroughly scrubbed the bore, use another wet patch again to remove any loose debris. Then switch to dry patches and continue running dry patches through the bore until they come out clean and dry.

Now, use a small amount of gun oil on a dry patch and run this through the bore to prevent rust accumulating during the off-season. You do not want to put too much oil in the bore because it can drip and pool causing damage to your stock if stored with the muzzle pointing up (which is not recommended). If you have ever seen gunstock that was split at the wrist, chances are the split was caused by over lubrication of the bore and chamber, then storing the gun with the muzzle pointing up which can weaken the wood and allow splitting when the gun is fired. Once the inside of the gun is cleaned, then run an oily rag over the outside of the gun to remove any fingerprints and body oil from the metal parts which can make the firearm rust. When possible, handle the firearm by the stock to reduce this issue.

As always, there are many various ways to clean your firearms, and what I am sharing is what I learned from my father some 40 years ago. ---Mike Brooks, Outdoor Education Center Supervisor

#### **FACILITIES AND FEES:**

September 14-April 14

April 15-September 13

Monday: 9 AM-4:30 PM

Thursday: 9 AM-7:30 PM Friday-Sunday: Noon-4:30 PM

Friday-Sunday: Noon-4:30 PM

Monday and Thursday: 9 AM-4:30 PM

**HOURS:** 

Available for individual and group use. Call for information and possible restrictions.

holidays. Hours are subject to change.

Closed Tuesdays, Wednesdays and all state

- Rifle/pistol range fee: \$3 per booth per hour
- Trap/skeet range fee: \$3 per person per round of 25 clay targets
- Shotgun patterning range: \$3 per person per hour
- Archery range: \$3 per person per hour
- Group use fee: \$20 per hour plus \$3 per round of 25 clay targets

#### TO REGISTER FOR A PROGRAM:

Programs are free. Call 417-742-4361 or email <DaltonRange@mdc.mo.gov> to sign up for a program requiring registration. If you are unable to attend a program, please call and cancel as a courtesy to those on the waiting list.

#### **HOLIDAY CLOSINGS:**

January 1 • New Year's Day and January 20 • Martin Luther King, Jr. Day February 12 • Lincoln Day and February 17 • Washington's Birthday

## **Springfield** Conservation Nature Center

4601 S. Nature Center Way, Springfield, MO 65804 • mdc.mo.gov/node/287





The Springfield Conservation Nature Center is located in southeast Springfield just west of US-65 off the James River Freeway (US-60). Indoors, enjoy nature exhibits, attend programs, purchase hunting and fishing permits, browse through a nature-related gift shop, and pick up free conservation brochures. Outdoors, enjoy three miles of hiking trails through a variety of natural communities. Call to schedule a naturalist-led program for your organized group.

#### **CURRENT HOURS:**

#### November 1-February 29

Building: Tuesday-Saturday: 8 AM-5 PM

Closed Sunday and Monday

Trails: Sunday-Saturday: 8 AM-6 PM

The building, area, and trails are closed Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Days.

#### TO REGISTER FOR A PROGRAM:

Programs are free. Call 417-888-4237 to sign up for a program requiring registration. If you are unable to attend a program, please call and cancel as a courtesy to others.



During the month of January, share your ideas and comments as we develop a 10-year Area Management Plan for the Springfield Conservation Nature Center. While not every idea will be included in the plan, we'll do our best to connect your comments to the Missouri Department of Conservation mission and the scientific knowledge of our professional naturalists, biologists, and foresters. Stop by to pick up a comment card or submit comments online at <mdc.mo.gov/areaplans>.

January Events\_

#### Story Time With Ms. Ladybug

January 8 • Wednesday • 11–11:30 AM No registration required (ages 2–6) Join Volunteer Naturalist Joyce Tolliver as she reads a nature story and shares activities with your 2-6 year olds. Please, no organized groups.

#### **Owl Prowl And Evening Stroll**

January 10 • Friday • 6-9 PM No registration required (all ages) Nesting season comes early for owls and they're already hooting in anticipation. The trails will be open and patrolled, so bring a flashlight and a walking partner because you're on your own. Dickerson Park Zoo docents will offer two indoor programs—one at 6:30 pm and one at 7:30 pm—to give you a close-up look at Missouri's owls.

#### **Conservation TEEN Club Winter Bird Watching**

January 11 • Saturday • 10 AM-4 PM Registration begins January 2 (ages 12–17) Join us for an outdoor birding hike at Busiek State Forest and Wildlife Area. Drinks, lunch, and transportation will be provided.

#### Nature Art With A **Chinese Brushstroke**

January 11 • Saturday • 1-2 PM, 2:15-3:15 PM, or 3:30-4:30 PM

Registration begins January 2 (ages 10 and up) Art instructor and nature enthusiast Hing Wah Hatch will increase your powers of observation as she demonstrates how to paint local plants and animals through Chinesestyle painting. Participants will increase their nature knowledge and create their own art. Observers are welcome to stop by. Ages 10 and up for the first two classes. The 3:30 class is for ages 15 and up.

#### **Eagle Days**

January 18 • Saturday • 9 AM-4 PM January 19 • Sunday • 12:30-4:30 PM No registration required (all ages) We're celebrating the annual return of bald eagles to Lake Springfield. This special event includes the indoor presence of Phoenix, a live bald eagle from Dickerson Park Zoo. Programs will be held in the nature center auditorium every hour on the hour from 9 am to 3 pm on Saturday and at 12:30, 1:30, 2:30, and 3:30 pm on Sunday. Stop by anytime and plan to spend about two hours. Opportunities to view bald eagles in the wild, with the assistance of volunteers and spotting scopes, will be available at the

Lake Springfield Boathouse and Marina during event hours.

#### **Smallmouth Bass Stream Fishing**

January 22 • Wednesday • 7–8 PM Registration begins January 2 (ages 12 and up) Ozarks streams offer excellent smallmouth bass fishing. Learn what type of tackle to use, places to go, and current research and management activities from Conservation Department Fisheries Management Biologist Dave Woods.

#### **Attracting Backyard Birds In Winter**

January 23 • Thursday • 10-11 AM Registration begins January 2 (ages 7 and up) Birds have a very difficult time in winter. If you ever intend to feed them, winter is the time when they need it most. Join Volunteer Naturalist, nature photographer, and birder Bob Ball for tips for attracting and providing for them.

#### **Predator Hunting**

January 23 • Thursday • 6-8 PM Registration begins January 2 (ages 11 and up) Have you ever wanted to experience the excitement of calling in a predator? If so, attend this informative program on predator hunting. Staff from the Department of Conservation will lead this beginner level program. Topics include seasons, hunting dates, methods regulating predator hunting, hunting safety, calls and calling, and wildlife identification.

#### **Hiking Club**

January 25 • Saturday • 8 AM-5 PM Registration begins January 2 (ages 18 and up) See the spectacular scenery that Ha Ha Tonka State Park has to offer. Volunteer Naturalist Carmen Hallock leads this five-mile hike. Meet at the nature center and carpool. Bring a sack lunch and water and wear comfortable hiking shoes. Hike is five miles and rated moderate to difficult.

#### Flv-Tving Demonstration

January 25 • Saturday • 1–4 PM *No registration required (all ages)* 

Members of the Missouri Trout Fishermen's Association will be on hand to demonstrate basic fly-tying techniques. Stop by anytime and learn how flies can imitate insects or other food that will fool a fish.

#### You Got Game?

January 30 • Thursday • 7–9 PM Registration begins January 2 (ages 10 and up) Outdoor enthusiasts always have guestions about care and usage of nature's bounty and we have answers. Learn how to care for game taken from the field and then prepare it for the table. Taste samples of wild game from fish to venison. Come enjoy a wild game taste-testing treat. Priority will be given to first-time attendees.

#### **Temporary Exhibits**

January • Eagles of the Ozarks • Photography by Dr. William Wagasy

February • Original Artwork by the Plein Air Society

Plein Air is a French phrase meaning "in the outdoors."

# **Springfield Conservation Nature Center** 4601 S. Nature Center Way, Springfield, MO 65804 • mdc.mo.gov/node/287

#### February Events\_

#### Winter Bird Walk

February 5 • Wednesday • 9-11 AM Registration begins January 21 (ages 7 and up) Join us to search for birds that make Lake Springfield their winter home. After a brief program at the nature center by Volunteer Naturalist Charley Burwick, we'll carpool to Lake Springfield. Dress warmly and bring binoculars if you have them.

#### **Conservation TEEN Club Map And Compass**

February 8 • Saturday • 9 AM-3 PM Registration begins January 21 (ages 12–17) Hey, teens, never be lost in the woods again! During this class, you'll learn the fundamentals of using topographical maps and an orienteering compass to find your way. After honing our skills, we'll spend the remainder of the afternoon in the field putting our newfound orienteering skills to work. Maps, compasses, lunch, and transportation will be provided. Don't forget to bring your water bottles.

#### **Low And Clear** Fly-Fishing Film At The Moxie Cinema

February 8 • Saturday • 2 PM Registration begins January 21 (ages 18 and up) We are teaming with the Moxie Cinema, at their new location at 305 South Campbell, for a special free showing of the fly-fishing film *Low and Clear*. Winner of the Audience Award at the South by Southwest Film Festival and hailed by *Paste* magazine as "the best documentary of the year," the 70-minute movie follows two old friends reuniting for what may be their last fishing trip together. (This film is not rated.)

#### **Bluebird Basics**

February 11 • Tuesday • 6:30-7:30 PM Registration begins February 1 (ages 5 and up with an adult mentor)

Parents, grandparents, and adult mentors, bring your youngster(s) to learn about our beautiful state bird, the eastern bluebird, and assemble a bluebird house (one per family) to take home. Bluebirds like open, rural areas and will not be attracted to or nest in most urban areas.

#### Story Time With Ms. Ladybug

February 12 • Wednesday • 11-11:30 AM *No registration required (ages 2–6)* Join Volunteer Naturalist Joyce Tolliver as she reads a nature story and shares activities with your 2-6 year olds. Please, no organized groups.

#### The Great Backyard Bird Count

February 14 • Friday • 9-11 AM February 15 • Saturday • 9–11 AM No registration required (all ages) Stop by and help count birds with members of the Greater Ozarks Audubon Society. Learn the basics of identification and how to count birds to contribute to the nature center's Great Backyard Bird Count tally sheet.

#### For Adults Only And Hiking Club Orienteering

February 15 • Saturday • 8 AM-5 PM Registration begins February 1 (ages 18 and up) Learn the basics of using a compass and topographic maps during the indoor portion of this program. After lunch, we'll test your newfound orienteering skills at Busiek State Forest and Wildlife Area. Bring a sack lunch and water and wear comfortable hiking shoes. Hike is approximately four miles and rated moderate in difficulty.

#### **Badge Bonanza**

February 18 • Tuesday • 6:30-8 PM Registration begins February 1 (ages 6 and up) Attention all scouting and youth organizations! Here's a program to help you earn nature badges. The focus will be on venomous animals, conservation careers, and knot tying. Program is also open to the public.

#### Feral Hogs-Missouri Menace

February 20 • Thursday • 7–8 PM Registration begins February 1 (ages 12 and up) Conservation Department Wildlife Damage Biologist James Dixon returns to share information about one of the biggest threats to wildlife and agriculture in Missouri-the feral hog. Learn the history of this illegally introduced species and what measures are being taken to eradicate them.

#### **Owl Prowl**

February 21 • Friday • 7-8:30 PM Registration begins February 1 (all ages) Nesting season comes early for owls and they're already hooting in anticipation. Dickerson Park Zoo will join us for a close-up look at live owls. We'll also head outside and try to call wild owls during a guided hike. Bring a flashlight.

#### **Women's Hike At Busiek**

February 22 • Saturday • 9 AM-1:30 PM Registration begins February 1 (girls ages 14-17 accompanied by an adult female are welcome) Enjoy the crisp winter air on a hike at Busiek State Forest and Wildlife Area. Meet at the nature center and carpool. Bring a sack lunch and water and wear comfortable hiking shoes. Hike is three miles and rated moderate to difficult. This program is for women only.

#### **Stockton Lake Fishing**

February 25 • Tuesday • 7–8 PM Registration begins February 1 (ages 12 and up) **Conservation Department Fisheries** Management Biologist Adam Bowman presents insight on

tactics and seasonal patterns that will help you target white bass, crappie, and walleye on Stockton Lake. He will also share 2014 fish population characteristics.

#### Conservation Kids' Club **Winter Olympics**

February 27 • Thursday • 6:30-7:45 PM Registration begins February 1 (ages 7–12) Even though the Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia, have recently ended, you don't have to wait another four years to celebrate winter Olympians. Learn about some true survivors as we discover the Olympic-like feats of some of Missouri's wildlife species.

#### **Bird Banding**

March 1 • Saturday • 1:30-4:30 PM No registration required (all ages) Here is your chance to see some of our avian friends up close! Join us for a winter bird banding demonstration with the Missouri River Bird Observatory. Birds will be captured around the feeding stations and then banded in a location for easy viewing. Stop by anytime.

#### **Little Acorns**

Please limit to one per month.

Programs are 45 minutes in length.

#### **January Events**

Registration begins January 2 (ages 3–6)

#### **Terrific Trout**

January 11 • Saturday • 11 AM January 15 • Wednesday • 11 AM or 1:30 PM Take a journey through the trout's life cycle and learn more about how to catch these terrific and tasty fish.

#### **Calling All Owls**

January 22 • Wednesday • 11 AM or 1:30 PM Who-o-o-o hoots when it gets dark? Who-o-o-o goes out for food at night? Is it a wise old owl? Bring your children during daylight hours to learn about owls.

### **February Events**

Registration begins February 1 (ages 3–6)

#### **Regal Eagles**

February 7 • Friday • 11 AM or 1:30 PM February 8 • Saturday • 11 AM Bald eagles are the kings of the sky. They are big, beautiful, and brawny. Come learn what other adaptations make these special birds like royalty.

#### **Skunk Scurry**

February 20 • Thursday • 11 AM or 1:30 PM There's more to a skunk than its smell. "Sniff out" some amazing skunk facts, learn a pre-spray skunk "dance," and take home a craft that won't "stink."

#### **Winter Woodpeckers**

February 28 • Friday • 11 AM or 1:30 PM Fly on in to learn more about these "hardheaded" birds and how to attract them to your yard during winter.

## Shepherd of the Hills Fish Hatchery and Conservation Center

483 Hatchery Road, Branson, MO 65616 • mdc.mo.gov/node/290



The Fish Hatchery and Conservation
Center is located on 221 acres in Branson
off Highway 165 next to Table Rock
Dam. Outdoors, visitors will experience
an active fish hatchery with 700,000
rainbow and brown trout in 30 pools with
opportunities to feed the fish. Indoors,
enjoy a 3,500 gallon aquarium and handson nature exhibits and purchase hunting
and fishing permits. The area also features
four hiking trails, a picnic area, a boat
ramp, and access to Lake Taneycomo.

#### **FACILITY HOURS:**

Memorial Day-Labor Day Sunday-Saturday: 9 AM-6 PM Remainder of Year Sunday-Saturday: 9 AM-5 PM

#### **AREA AND TRAIL HOURS:**

4 AM-10 PM

The area is open to fishing 24 hours daily, but special permits and regulations do apply. Check the current fishing regulations or call for details.

#### TO REGISTER FOR A PROGRAM:

Programs are free. Call 417-334-4865, Ext. 0, to sign up for a program requiring registration. If you are unable to attend a program, please call and cancel as a courtesy to those on the waiting list.

### FISHING LAKE TANEYCOMO:

Before fishing on Lake
Taneycomo, become familiar
with the regulations and
restrictions. Come by for a free
brochure of the entire lake including fishing accesses. For specific
details about trout fishing here
and across the state, visit
<mdc.mo.gov/node/5603>.

January and February Events

#### M.A.S.H. For Winter Survival

January 18 • Saturday • 10–11:30 AM Registration required (ages 12 and up)
Ever wonder what animals do in winter? This program will help explain the four main strategies that animals undertake to survive the coldest and most extreme conditions of the year. We will have a few live animals available to touch as you learn about these amazing winter survival strategies.



#### **Owl Prowl**

February 14 • Friday • 7–9 PM Registration required (all ages)
Here is your chance to learn more about our often misunderstood owls. In addition to learning about some myths and legends, you will also learn what makes owls such great nighttime hunters. Dress for the weather because the program involves a night hike to "call" to owls. Snacks and hot chocolate will be provided after the night hike.

#### **Vulture Venture**

February 22 • Saturday • Noon—5 PM No registration required (all ages)
This is our 18<sup>th</sup> annual event that features the incredibly unique vultures in our area. Here is your opportunity to see one of the largest winter roosts of vultures in the state. The event includes hourly presentations featuring "Socrates," a live turkey vulture from the WOW Museum in Springfield. There will also be indoor games, trivia, and activities. Outdoors you will get to see wild vultures roosting near the hatchery. Staff and volunteers will help you view the vultures with spotting scopes. The last presentation begins at 4 p.m.

### Winter Trout Fishing Opportunities

Even though the conditions can be challenging during the winter, trout fishing is still just as exciting now as during the rest of the year. There are several places in southwest Missouri that are available to fish for trout this winter to hone your skills, especially before the March 1 season opener at the four Missouri trout parks. These include lakes, parks, and streams that are managed for winter trout fishing opportunities.

Check out the specific regulations before fishing at any of the following locations.

**Lakes**: Taneycomo is one of the few lakes that supports trout fishing all year long. Many trout fishermen prepare for the March 1 trout season opener by fishing there in February. Special regulations apply.

**Parks**: Bennett Spring State Park and Roaring River State Park offer catch-and-release trout fishing from early November through February 10.

**Streams**: Niangua River, Shoal Creek, Capps Creek, and Crane Creek are premiere trout fishing locations that are open all year. Special regulations apply.

So don't let winter slow you down. Enjoy great winter trout fishing opportunities because southwest

Missouri is a great place to hunt and fish.

For more information about winter trout fishing and places to fish for trout visit <mdc. mo.gov/node/5603>.

– John Miller Interpretive Center Manager

#### **Winter Fly-Tying Classes**

January 11 • January 25 • February 8 Saturday • 2–4 PM Registration required (ages 12 and up)

Local fishing guide Jeremy Hunt will teach you how to tie a variety of flies to use for trout fishing. Jeremy provides all the materials for the class as well as excellent instruction. Bringing a fly-tying vise is recommended, but if you don't own one, a limited supply of loaner vises will be available. Jeremy will not only show various techniques on how to create these amazing flies, but also the proper presentation techniques to make them irresistible to trout.

## **Southwest Regional Office** 2630 N. Mayfair Avenue, Springfield, MO 65803 • mdc.mo.gov/node/257

### Many Sights to See on Winter Hike

Whoever said nature goes dormant in winter has never walked through an Ozarks countryside or forest trail at this time of year. It's true trees aren't leafed out, flowers aren't blooming, some animals aren't seen because they're hibernating or have migrated south, but it's equally true that the outdoors around us is far from comatose. Some people would argue that on days when the weather provides temperatures we can handle, this is the best time of year to get outside.

For starters, ticks, chiggers, mosquitoes, and all the other creatures that sting, bite, and buzz are gone. You can take off through the brush and tall grass without worrying about having to do a tick check or chigger scrub at the end of your trip. Also because the leaves are gone and much of the vegetation has either died or withered, visibility is better. Deer in the underbrush that would have gone undetected five months ago are visible now because the thicket isn't nearly as thick. Turkeys gather into flocks in winter and make for interesting sightings if you're fortunate to come upon them. Find an old snag tree during your walk, and you may see one of a variety of woodpecker species hammering away at the trunk in search of a meal. Bald eagles are the winter birds that get much of the publicity, but you never know when you may see one of several species of hawks perched in a nearby tree searching for a meal.

If you're wondering where to go, you may want to check out your nearest Department of Conservation area. The Springfield Conservation Nature Center is a popular nature-viewing spot inside Springfield, but you don't have to stop there. While Conservation-owned lands are popular spots during hunting seasons, many of these sites have hiking trails too. As hunting seasons wind down and hunter traffic lessens at these areas, they become great spots for nature viewing. Most Department of Conservation areas are open daily from 4 a.m. until 10 p.m. It's a good idea to check with your local Conservation office or visit the Missouri Department of Conservation's website at <mdc.mo.gov> to see what hunting activity may be taking place (or to find a location where hunting isn't permitted).

- Francis Skalicky, Media Specialist



The Southwest Regional Office is conveniently located just west of the intersection of US-65 and Kearney in Springfield. The public may obtain information on land management, nuisance wildlife, educational opportunities, river and pond management, and more, as well as purchase hunting and fishing permits and obtain area brochures for Conservation Department areas.

**HOURS:** Monday–Friday: 8 AM–5 PM Closed all state holidays

PHONE: 417-895-6880

Conservation makes Missouri a great place to hunt and fish.



## **Rabbit Hunting**

### Simple and Fun

Rabbit season doesn't get as much hype as deer season or some of Missouri's other hunting events, but it's a season that's special to many Ozarkers. For some of the area's devoted cottontail hunters, this season is an outdoors tradition that has a long and cherished history. Long before deer and turkey were in the hunting spotlight, the pursuit of cottontails was a favorite late fall and winter pastime for many area hunters.

Missouri's rabbit hunting season runs from October 1 to February 15, but now is the time of year a number of people's thoughts begin to turn to rabbit hunting. One of the reasons is that deer hunting, which overshadows other hunting pursuits, is winding down. (The late youth portion of the firearms deer season is January 4 and 5 and archery season ends January 15.) Another reason is the simple fact that there's something about cold winter weather and rabbit hunting that go together.

One reason for rabbit hunting's popularity is its simplicity. Some people use dogs while others merely walk the fields

and meadows, but either way, it's fairly fundamental. No decoys, game calls, camouflage clothing, or high-tech gadgetry are needed. Basically, it's just you versus an animal that provides a sporting pursuit and a tasty meal.

Although some rabbit hunters won't take to the field until the first good snow, rabbits are probably at greater numbers when the season starts in October than they are during the cold weeks of January and early February. Fall is when rabbit populations and protective cover are both at their highest levels. As a habitat is reduced by winter weather and crop harvests, rabbit populations shrink in correlation.

Even though rabbits are abundant at the start of the season in October, hunters are wise to wait until the cold weather arrives. The best way to avoid the bacterial disease tularemia, which affects some rabbits, is to postpone hunting until cold weather arrives. A hard frost and ensuing cold weather will kill the ticks and fleas that carry the disease. The rabbits that were infected prior to the freeze will normally die within a few days of contracting the disease.

The bag limit for Missouri's rabbit hunting season is six and the possession limit is twelve. More information about rabbit hunting or habitat preparation that will ensure good rabbit populations for future years can be obtained at the Department of Conservation's Southwest Regional Office in Springfield. Rabbit information can also be obtained online from the Conservation Department's website at <mdc.mo.gov>. - Francis Skalicky, Media Specialist



## Nature Connections Newsletter

To begin receiving the newsletter by mail, call any of the offices listed in the newsletter and leave your name and address.

To begin receiving the newsletter electronically by e-mail, go online to <mdc.mo.gov/node/257>, click the "Subscribe by Email" box on the right-hand side of the page, and scroll down to "Nature Connections."

## Great Backyard Bird Count February 14–17



By participating in this joint project of Cornell University Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society, you can help document where birds are and track changes in their numbers compared to previous years, helping scientists determine the status of birds this winter. You can count birds in your backyard, a local park, or other natural areas on one or all count days. Visit <br/>birdsource.org/gbbc/> or stop by the Springfield Conservation Nature Center and pick up a packet with data sheets and further information.

#### **Conservation Area Showcase:**

### Bushwhacker Lake Conservation Area

**LOCATION:** The Bushwhacker Lake Conservation Area is located in southwest Vernon and northwest Barton counties. It is located approximately 1.5 miles southeast of Bronaugh, 14 miles southwest of Nevada, 15 miles northwest of Lamar, and 43 miles north of Joplin. Access to the lake and many of the parking lots on the area is by taking Zodiac Road, west of Highway 43, approximately 1.5 miles south of Bronaugh.

HISTORY: The original purchase for this area was 1,739 acres in 1978. Located on the area is the 157-acre Bushwhacker Lake and the 28-acre Willow Lake. Other land purchases over the past 25 years have brought the total acreage of the area to 4,790 acres. All tracts were purchased with Department of Conservation revenue under the Design for Conservation program. This area was purchased to conserve and enhance the natural resources of the area and provide quality outdoor recreation. There are currently over 1,300 acres of native prairie on the area and efforts to restore and reconstruct prairie habitat on the area is a priority management focus.

**FISHING:** This area has 5 lakes and ponds managed for fishing opportunities (Bushwhacker Lake–157 acres, Willow Lake–29 acres, Jump Shoot Pond–5.3 acres, Little Italy Pond–4.7 acres and Wasp Pond–0.3 acres). Bushwhacker Lake has a concrete boat ramp, fishing dock, and 3 jetties. Access to Willow Lake and the other ponds is by foot only. Fish species present in these lakes/ponds include grass carp, largemouth bass, bluegill, redear sunfish, channel catfish, golden shiner, bullhead, green sunfish, and crappie. See the area regulations for more specific restrictions when fishing on the area.

**HUNTING:** Due to the mix of various grasslands, old field, crop, and woodland habitats, this area is very productive for many game species including white-tailed deer, turkey, quail, rabbit, squirrel, and coyote. Bushwhacker Lake Conservation Area is open to hunting under statewide regulations except that only archery and muzzleloading methods may be used for deer hunting. The interspersion of crop fields, food plots, and woodlands, along with the various habitat management practices done on the area throughout the year (prescribed burning, annual disking, woodland thinning, small grain legume planting, and grassland reconstructing), result in ample food and cover for these species. There are numerous small ponds and portions of the larger lakes that provide opportunity for waterfowl hunting. There are 20 parking areas that provide access to most of the area for hunting and other recreation.

**CAMPING, HIKING, AND BIRDING:** Primitive camping on the area is allowed only on the two designated camping areas on the west side of Bushwhacker Lake. Facilities along the lake include parking pads for campers and tent sites, 3 latrines, campfire rings, a fishing dock, and 3 jetties. Horses are allowed on a 6.6-mile multi-use trail from May 15 to August 30. There is a 1-mile hiking trail along the west shore of Bushwhacker Lake and several miles of access trails throughout the area (no vehicles allowed). Unique birds found on the area include prairie chickens, short-eared owls, scissor-tailed flycatchers, dickcissels, and grasshopper sparrows.

For a map of the area and more information on Bushwhacker Lake Conservation Area, visit the Missouri Department of Conservation website at <mdc.mo.gov/a7823>.

- Dave Darrow, Wildlife Management Biologist